



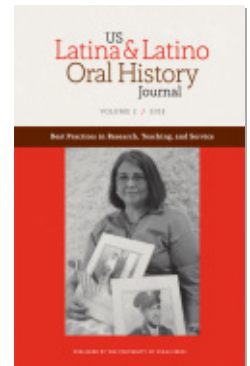
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Califia Women: Feminist Education against Sexism, Classism, and Racism by Clark A. Pomerleau (review)

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(Review)

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oral history practices. That said, the analysis of Nájera's rich findings would have been enhanced with some engagement with the literature of memory studies. Doing so would have enabled her to better sift through potentially deeper meanings of their recollections. Nonetheless, *Borderlands of Race* is engaging and informative, and deepens our understanding of the struggles of Mexican Americans.

Califia Women: Feminist Education against Sexism, Classism, and Racism

by Clark A. Pomerleau

University of Texas Press. 2013.

269 pages. paper \$25.

ISBN 978-1-4773-0220-0.

REVIEWED BY YOLANDA FLORES

One cannot help but wonder what might have happened in the past forty-five years if social grassroots movements and consciousness-raising, women-centered, feminist communities of the 1970s had survived to continue their efforts in educating women against sexism, classism, and racism.

It is the history of one of these groups that Clark A. Pomerleau traces in *Califia Women: Feminist Education against Sexism, Classism, and Racism*. Through oral history interviews, archival work, and secondary texts, Pomerleau reconstructs the history of the creation, internal struggles, and dissolution of a community of women in Southern California. In 1975–1987, Califia held a weekend workshop, conferences, and short-term summer camps to educate themselves on how to combat sexism, classism, and racism. Pomerleau writes, “The experience strengthened many women’s sense of shared culture and collective identity as ‘Califia women’” (1).

Following feminist oral history methodology as espoused by scholars such as Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, Pomerleau’s interviewing model drew candid responses from his interviewees in their responses to questions on intimate issues such as sexual orientation, domestic violence, and racial, ethnic, cultural, and class differences. Ranging from the community’s cofounders to women in leadership, and a few in non-leadership, positions, Pomerleau interviewed thirty-two women who attended meetings and workshops during the twelve-year span of Califia. In contrast to other feminist communities of the 1970s, Califia made great efforts to include women of color: of this total, seven or eight appear to have been Chicana or Latina women; the exact number is difficult to ascertain as several interviewees chose to use a pseudonym.

Pomerleau begins each chapter with feminist history and theory and discusses it in the context of the specific political, social, and cultural complexities of the period covered in each section. The oral history interviews are woven into the analysis of how Califa was founded, developed, and dissolved. The goal of the two founders, Los Angeles-based academics, was to take feminist education beyond academic settings to include community members not traditionally privy to the privileged setting of academia. In this sense, the merging of academic and community, of theory and practice, was consistent with what other civil rights groups (e.g., Chicano/a, African American) practiced at that time. The book is divided into chapters that follow the chronological and thematic discussions of the Califa conferences. Each chapter shows how feminist theory informed and manifested the discussions of Califa's conferences, workshops, and summer camps.

In the introductory chapter, Pomerleau situates Califa within the history of social movements in the United States; he argues that Califa's existence challenges the false notion that white women were indifferent to other forms of oppression, as has traditionally characterized the second wave of feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. The second chapter, "Founding, Fun, and Friction," details the creation of this woman-only educational community; in the words of Marilyn Murphy, one of the cofounders: "We called ourselves Califa because she is the legendary Black Amazon/Goddess for whom California was originally named. Califa Community is committed to the development of a multicultural community of the spirit of women through feminist education" (42). The exploration of feminine identity through the discussion of body shape, sexuality, and lesbianism constitutes chapter 3; the fourth chapter centers on the effects on recruiting working-class women to work with middle-class members through a feminist class consciousness; the fifth chapter, "Antiracism to Get under Your Skin," centers on how Califa dealt with discussions of race, inclusiveness, and multiculturalism; and the last chapter narrates the dissolution of the community due to right-wing attacks on feminism and to the community's own internal tensions and growth toward third-wave feminism.

The oral histories of Latinas and other women of color are more prominent in chapter 5. Difficult questions such as who should teach and learn about racism were raised by women of color. Latina members felt, at times, their participation tokenized. The difficulty in unlearning white privilege is another challenge chronicled in this chapter. For example, in a camp in 1978, the one woman of color who was invited to teach on racism was asked to read a poem by another woman of color. Instead, this participant asked that all women of color stand up. With five women of color holding hands, Professor María Dolores Díaz said, "This is your racism presentation" (125). This chapter details the difficulties in creating and maintaining a truly multiracial feminist organization, one in which the hierarchies of race, ethnicity, and class are not reenacted in the actions of members of the organization. Yet María Soto, a Califa member from 1982 to 1987, noted: "The thing that intrigued me about Califa was it was the only organization

doing antiracism work and work on class, which nobody was doing at that time. . . . And I believe the political, the personal is political. I wanted to reach out to other women who were different and to see where I fit and Califia was really diverse” (130). From these two interviews of Latina participants, one may infer that there was genuine growth in the antiracist pedagogical efforts of Califia.

Clark Pomerleau in *Califia Women: Feminist Education against Sexism, Classism, and Racism* has documented the history of a feminist community in California that tried to teach and empower its members to combat sexism, classism, and racism. Through its consciousness-raising feminist workshops, conferences, and summer camps, Califia attempted to create social change through the education of its members. It is a book of interest to historians, feminist scholars, practitioners of oral history, and to Latina/o and other scholars of color interested in learning of coalitions and activism across racial, gender, ethnic, and class distinctions.

Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South

by John D. Márquez

University of Texas Press. 2013.

285 pages. paper \$27.95.

ISBN 978-1-4773-0216-3.

REVIEWED BY MARIO N. CASTRO-VILLARREAL

The subjects of activism and the preservation of oral histories in communities of color have remained central to the preoccupations of ethnic studies over the past forty years. And yet much less ink has been spilled regarding the development of interracial coalitions between minority groups. Nonetheless, this understudied subject is rapidly becoming a field of research in its own right, and *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South*, by John D. Márquez, signals a major shift in the methodological and geographical scope of this nascent area of ethnic studies.

Focusing on Baytown, an industrial city in the greater Houston area, and in close proximity to the Louisiana border, Márquez describes in vivid detail his upbringing as a dark-skinned Mexican American in a space marked by over a century of antiblack violence and police brutality. In the lengthy introduction, the author describes his alienation from his family's Chicano roots, an identity that he embraced only after he left Baytown for California, and his hybrid experience as a Latino teen living in a black working-class community. Utilizing an interdisciplinary methodology (anthropology,